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Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, July 12, 2007

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July 12, 2007

GOP-led panel to probe child deaths

Dems call GOP-only task force that replaces bipartisan one redundant.

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

LANSING -- Frustrated with progress in reforming child welfare in the state, House Republicans established a task force Wednesday to investigate the deaths of four Michigan foster children in the past two years.

The Child Protection Task Force replaces a bipartisan committee formed last year to investigate the deaths, but disbanded when Democrats took control of the state House in November. The new panel comprises Republicans and already is criticized as partisan and unnecessary.

"There's an attitude in Lansing right now that the only thing we need to worry about is the budget," said state Rep. Rick Jones, R-Grand Ledge, a task force member. "I agree the budget is very, very important, however there are many more things we should work on and certainly the safety of our children is one of the most important."

The panel, chaired by state Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township, will investigate systematic failures that may have contributed to recent deaths and murders.

Ricky Holland's parents, Tim and Lisa Holland of Williamston, are in prison for murder after the July 2005 abuse death of the 7-year-old they adopted through the foster care system.

A Detroit foster mother, Charlsie Adams-Rogers, was convicted of involuntary manslaughter last month in the August beating death of Isaac Lethbridge, 2. A Canton Township foster mother, Carol Poole, awaits a murder trial for the September death of Allison Newman, 2.

Charges have yet to be brought in the April homicide of James E. Bradley Jr., 3, in Van Buren.

"There needs to be a total investigation," said Craig Hirsh, 64, of Canton Township, the grandfather of Allison Newman. "I applaud their efforts."

But Dan Farrough, spokesman for House Speaker Andy Dillon, D-Redford Township, said the House already has a committee that oversees child welfare. Karen Stock, spokeswoman for the state Department of Human Services, said the system already has extensive oversight.

"We have quite a robust system for reviewing child deaths," Stock said.

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Boy pulled from neighbor's pool dies

Thursday, July 12, 2007

By Theresa D. McClellan

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A 3-year-old boy died early today, two days after he was pulled from a neighbor's pool and one day after authorities removed him and two siblings from their mother's custody.

The court's terms allowed Melissa Matthews to be with her youngest son, Jeremiah, who was on life support at DeVos Children's Hospital until this morning. Court officials also are allowing "liberal" visitation between Matthews, 26, and her surviving children, ages 5 and 7.

Matthews wept Wednesday upon hearing the decision. Authorities say her children have a history of being unsupervised.

"This is a tragic case, but she has had 18 months of intensive supervision and nothing works, then this happens," said Ginny Mikita, who is the court-appointed lawyer for the children.

Neighbors said Matthews' children were wandering the streets for about three hours Tuesday before they ventured into the gated yard at 49 Straight Ave. NW and entered the pool. The homeowner, Victor Cruz, who has a second-shift job, was awakened around 11:30 a.m. by Melissa Matthews' screams in his backyard.

The children had run home for help after Jeremiah went into the pool. Matthews said she jumped into the pool after her son. She tried to revive him and was assisted by neighbors until authorities arrived.

Police believe the boy was under water for at least 10 minutes.

Matthews said she thought her children were playing with friends in the neighborhood and had no idea they were in the pool.

According to records, child welfare authorities had contact with Matthews in each of the past three years, including an incident in which one of her younger children was found trying to cross a busy street alone in 2005.

Child Protective Services officials told the magistrate they exhausted all their efforts to make Matthews more responsible, and nothing worked. Following an investigation by CPS, she would follow their guidelines for a time, then return to her old habits, court records show.

Magistrate John Kmetz noted Wednesday that Matthews has gone through several programs.

"You jump through every hoop ever given to you, you do it well, but when there is no hoop, you don't follow through with what you've learned," Kmetz said.

The surviving children will live with a foster family as the courts determine the best placement option.

"This is a sad and unfortunate ordeal and a hard lesson learned," said Matthews' aunt, Donna Marlette. "Supervision is needed to be a good parent. Now, she has to have time to grieve."

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Mother of near-drowning child: 'I blame myself'

Updated: July 12, 2007 07:32 AM EDT

GRAND RAPIDS -- A three-year-old boy remains in critical condition at DeVos Children's Hospital in Grand Rapids after being [submerged in a swimming pool](#) for 10 minutes.

Jeremiah Matthews, his seven-year-old brother and five-year-old sister wandered from home Tuesday and entered a neighbor's yard at 49 Straight Avenue NW through a gate. Jeremiah and his sister jumped into the pool in the backyard. The girl then got out of the pool but Jeremiah did not.

The girl and her older brother ran for help. Rescue personnel arrived at the scene and worked on Jeremiah before taking him to the hospital.

Now questions are being asked about the case - where was the kids' mother and should the gate to the neighbor's pool have been locked?

A pool gate needs to have a lock but not locked at all times.

As for where was the mother? This isn't the first time that question has been posed.

"Jeremiah's a mama's boy. He's my life. I don't know what I'll do without him or my other two," Melissa Matthews, the children's mother, told 24 Hour News 8.

We asked her about how the kids wandered. Witnesses say for hours without supervision before they ventured to the pool.

"I don't blame anybody but myself," Matthews said.

Sources with the State say Matthews has had a number of run-ins with Child Protective Services. There was already open case for neglect before the Tuesday's incident.

"I'm so angry at myself 'cause...cussin' myself out because this stuff should have never happened," Matthews says.

After our interview, she was in court where a judge put her other two kids under the care of the Department of Human Services.



Jeremiah Matthews



Melissa Matthews



The pool where the incident occurred on Tuesday.



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Mother of teen who died in crash appears in court

Updated: July 11, 2007 09:27 PM EDT

KENT COUNTY -- New information tonight about the mother of a 15-year-old girl who died in an Ottawa County crash in Robinson Township.

Graciella Trevino, mother to Claudia who died in the accident, appeared in Kent County Family Court Wednesday.

24 Hour News 8 has learned that the state had warned Trevino at least two times before to not let her daughter drive.

Her daughter had no license when she ran a stop sign at Osborn and 104th in Robinson Township and slammed into a truck.

She died and her four young passengers were injured. One of those, a 5-year-old, remains in critical condition tonight.

The children had previously been in foster care. The state had just recently allowed the children to return to the mother's care, but the state has taken custody of them again.



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Foster parents rally against law change

Wednesday, July 11, 2007 11:41 AM EDT

To the editor: I am a foster parent from Saginaw County. We are organizing a protest on the steps of the state capitol on July 18 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. for all Michigan foster parents.

We are protesting against a bill that, if passed, would privatize foster care in Michigan. Although we have nothing against the private agencies or the foster parents who foster with them, we do have issues with this bill, which is SB232.

We feel that this bill is about money and not children. We ask that foster parents throughout Michigan head to Lansing, as this bill—if passed—will cause changes in the system that is now in place.

I have spoken with state workers all over Michigan and foster parents who have tried to share their views on this bill with politicians and feel they are not being heard.

So, we are headed to Lansing as it might be easier to be heard there.

Foster parents have a role to speak out on issues with children—take this chance and join us.

If you have questions please call Kim Rowan (989) 868-3527 or Laura Wood (989) 642-2171. If you're coming, wear red.

Kim Rowan
Saginaw County Foster Parent



Infant sent to foster care

Thursday, July 12, 2007

GRAND RAPIDS -- A magistrate on Wednesday ordered an infant into foster care after the child's mother allegedly allowed a 15-year-old daughter to drive. The 15-year-old, Claudia Trevino, was killed Monday in a crash in Ottawa County that injured other siblings. The victim was not licensed, police said. The case involving the infant -- who was born July 3 and was not in the car -- will be transferred to Muskegon County, where an emergency hearing is set today regarding older children of Graciella Trevino, court officials said.

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'Celebrate Children' to offer old fashioned

The County Journal | 11

campfire for foster parents, families

On Thursday, August 2 at 6 p.m., the Celebrate Children group will share an old fashioned campfire with Ealon area children who live with foster parents.

The evening will begin with a hotdog roast, potluck and dessert of "s'mores." Children will then play summer camp games while the foster parents hold their regular meeting. As a culminating event, a professional storyteller and author has been invited to join them around the campfire and share stories of Africa. The evening will close

with camp songs and prayer.

Nine women from Charlotte area churches met weekly earlier this year and studied **TOO SMALL TO IGNORE: Why Children are the Next Big Thing**, a text by Wess Stafford, President and CEO of Compassion International, the organization that sponsors literally millions of children all over the world.

Stafford's text documents his childhood in Ivory Coast, Africa. The strength of that community percolated in his head as he observed intimate intergenerational connections

among residents of all ages.

When he came to the United States, he quickly observed that such a connection rarely exists within communities here, and his book inspired these women to "do something."

The Celebrate Children group examined how folks right here in the Charlotte area might learn from Stafford's experiences and subsequent observations. As a result of their study, the group decided to find a way to support local children.

One of the members, Ju-

lie Wiles, Coordinator of the Family-to-Family Program for Barry/Eaton Counties, suggested that they might care for children while the foster parents hold their once monthly meeting. The group has been doing just that at the Charlotte Assembly of God church every first Thursday of the month since February.

Caring for the children has taken the form of music, structured centers-based activities, storytelling, food, with generous portions of smiles, laughter, and love.

The women try to

strengthen the scaffolding that protects children so that they can better manage the stressors in their lives. Stressors frequently take the form of abuse, neglect, poverty, illness, frequent moves, upheaval in the family, and homelessness.

Scaffolding might take the form of: Positive role models; caring people who actively listen to the child; at least one caring adult who spends focused time with the child; service projects performed cooperatively with other youth; support within

an engaging Christian community; encouragement from strong Christian friends.

Readers who may wish become a Celebrate Children volunteer are asked to email either Barb Myckowiak at bmyckowiak@ia4u.net or Barb Davis at barbjdavis@sbcglobal.net. The group is particularly interested in adding male volunteers who might serve as role models for boys.

Article submitted by Barbara J. Davis and Abbie Hunting.

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Convicted of assault, man gives up rights to child

LAPEER COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, July 12, 2007

By James L. Smith

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LAPEER - A man sentenced to prison for stabbing the mother of his child during an argument over visitation rights voluntarily gave up his parental rights to the 16-month-old girl Wednesday.

Last November, Edward K. Johnson, 20, of Detroit, drove to the Oregon Township home where his former girlfriend and the couple's baby were living and demanded to see his child.

When the mother refused to let him take the child, he slashed her in the neck and arm, court records show.

Johnson was sentenced to 4 years, 9 months in prison by Lapeer Circuit Judge Nick O. Holowka after pleading guilty to assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than murder and breaking and entering as part of a plea deal.

- James L. Smith

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July 12, 2007**EDITORIAL**

Juvenile Justice

One of Congress's most crucial tasks will be to strengthen and update the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. Passed in 1974, the law required the states to move away from the practice of locking up truants and runaways — and to refrain from placing children in adult jails — in exchange for federal grant dollars.

Congress's goal then was to move the states away from failed policies that often turned young delinquents into hardened criminals and toward a framework based more on mentoring and rehabilitation. But the states have increasingly classified ever larger numbers of young offenders as adults, trying them in adult courts and holding them in adult prisons.

The damage wrought by these policies is vividly outlined in a federally backed study issued this spring. It reports that children handled in adult courts and confined in adult jails committed more violent crime than children processed through the traditional juvenile justice system. Other studies show that as many as half of the juvenile offenders sent to adult courts were not convicted there — or were sent back to the juvenile system, but often after spending time in adult lockups. Equally disturbing is the fact that youths of color are more likely to be sent to adult prisons than their white counterparts.

Reauthorization hearings begin today and members need to listen closely to what the experts are saying. Trying children as adults — except in isolated cases involving extreme violence — is both inhumane and counterproductive.

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Man backs over wife with pickup truck

POLICE BLOTTER

TYRONE TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, July 12, 2007

By Shantell M. Kirkendoll

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A Tyrone Township man backed over his wife with a pickup truck Tuesday as she attempted to keep him from leaving following a domestic dispute, according to the Livingston County Sheriff's Department.

She is in stable condition at Genesys Regional Medical Center. Her injuries were described as non-life threatening.

Emergency workers and neighbors at Tyrone Woods Trailer Park used a forklift to free her from beneath the truck. She was pinned under the vehicle following the fight at about 10 p.m.

The names of the couple were not released. The 40-year-old man is in Livingston County Jail awaiting arraignment for felonious assault with a motor vehicle and domestic violence.

Livingston County EMS and the Fenton Township Fire Department assisted with the rescue.

- Shantell M. Kirkendoll

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It has a familiar ring to it: 'Driving while brown'



Written by Gretchen Cochran

Lansing City Pulse
Wednesday, 11 July 2007

The NAACP had a mock funeral for the "N word" in Detroit Monday. It may be replaced by the "M word."

Mexicans are the new butt of stupid jokes. Here's one, courtesy of Neal Boortz, nationally syndicated radio personality heard locally on WILS AM. It goes something like this:

"One of my brilliant listeners came up with the solution to the immigration problem. You locate all of the crossing points across our border and you paint crosswalks on them. How many of you have ever seen a Mexican use a crosswalk? So, as soon as you paint crosswalks at all of these crossing points along the border, they won't cross anymore."

Ask people of Mexican heritage how they feel about being characterized as too stupid to get themselves across the street and passions pour forth. But first you have to cross the river of distrust. That river flows two ways.

While prejudice and discrimination have always been in season, since Sept. 11, 2001, Michiganders' fear of immigrants, but particularly those of brown skin, has grown, said Peter Vargas, Gov. Jennifer Granholm's Latino outreach coordinator for her gubernatorial campaign. Nearly 80 percent of Michigan's Latinos are of Mexican heritage; about 11,000 Latinos live in Lansing.

Now, even though all of the Sept. 11 hijackers had proper documents, some believe terrorism will be averted if everyone carries a computer-readable photo ID. So while the bureaucracy attempts to grapple with the issue of possibly 12 million undocumented workers nationwide, the spillover filters into the entire brown community.

It is expected to get worse. Some say that as the noose of recently enacted laws tightens on those here illegally, large numbers will be "disappeared," slipping into an underworld away from the law and into a less healthy and more dangerous place.

Latinos are definitely afraid, said Prof. Ruben Parro of MSU's Marriage and Family Program in the Human Ecology Department. Last year he and his students surveyed employers and case workers in the Mid-Michigan social services system, asking them to

rank concerns most likely facing Latinos. The employers and case workers ranked fear of discrimination as number eight. Latinos themselves ranked it number one.

That fear is turning people within mid-Michigan's Latino community against one another, pitting those born here and thus "legal," against those born elsewhere, and perhaps not legal. The climate is giving employers license for workplace abuse, and emboldening police officers to behave shamelessly, according to men and women gathered at Cristo Rey Community Church to talk about what it feels like to be living under a cloud of suspicion.

Cristo Rey was founded on Lansing's south side in 1961 to serve the Latino population. Today 95 percent of the congregation is of Latino descent, coming to the church from throughout the region, the Rev. Fred Thelen said. Six hundred families are registered but many more kneel there. The first Mass on Sunday morning, packed last week with people of all ages, including many young families, is conducted in Spanish. The second service is a combination of Spanish and English.

When people make ugly comments about Mexicans, they're talking about caricatures, speaking out of ignorance, Thelen said.

"You won't find harder working people, trying to provide for families, many holding two jobs with low pay," he said. In areas with strong Hispanic populations, crime rates tend to go down because of their family and community values.

But Santiago Rios, a lawyer with the state attorney general's office, said everyone in this debate is using stereotypes.

"I am proud of my Mexican heritage, but because I grew up in Michigan, I have little in common with those coming from Mexico now, other than language," he said.

People from Cuba and Guatemala have different heritages. Some Latinos have good family values, and some don't.

Rios smiled when he heard the crosswalk joke. "We do have a right to say such things here," he said.

But he added: "I do think the users of the public airways have a higher calling to not be offensive or abusive." If he were the manager of the radio station, he would not have run the statement. (It ran as a commercial promoting Boortz' show.)

"We are in America where we do have a justice system," he said. Sometimes we have to challenge it. And with our vote we can change the status quo, Rios said. But admittedly, for those who are poor, thinking about changing a political system is a leap.

Following Sunday's mass at Cristo Rey, about 20 people gathered to tell their stories,

some of the tales perhaps urban legends, but they display the feeling of persecution.

“Marta” told of being stopped by a Lansing police officer for running her car through a yellow light. She was told that it is illegal to go through a yellow light, and her fine was \$100. She was advised not to fight the accusation, and quietly paid the \$100.

Latinos talk of “driving while brown,” the racial profiling term patterned after the term “driving while black.”

“Juan” had three Latino Lansing friends touring Detroit three weeks ago when the local police stopped them. They were asked to show identification proving they were U.S. citizens. Having none, they were given two options: pay \$5,000 and they would be let go, or the police would take them to the immigration office. Two scraped up the cash; the third was shipped off to Mexico, he said.

Juan, 18, works in construction and is here illegally, trying to earn money for a college education he can only afford in Mexico. He works harder, accomplishes more, and is paid less than others at his job site, he said.

“Maria” and a Latina friend worked at a local golf course. But recently, other employees spoke of them as “those Mexicans,” refusing to call them by name. Maria and her friend quit.

Various others in contact with the Latino community had worse stories to tell, but not about the Lansing area. Homeland Security staked out the parking lot at Sacred Heart Chapel in Jackson and rounded up people going into the church. A call to the chapel yielded a recording saying “the sisters are out of the chapel until Sept. 1.”

Vince Delgado, director of the Refugee Development Center in Lansing, believes Lansing residents have a different sense about Mexicans and others because “immigrants and refugees are their next-door neighbors.” St. Vincent Catholic Charities has been re-settling at least 300 refugees per year in Lansing, all legally documented, for the last 30 years, said Mary Flores, director of refugee settlement.

However, as one moves out from the city, attitudes begin to change and fears of unknowns grow, couched in terms of economics. So the noose tightens.

While Comprehensive Immigration Reform, or CIR, failed in Congress last month, other laws have been enacted that snatch the welcome sign from the streets on which undocumented workers live and work. In 1996, the federal government eliminated benefits to all unless they were U. S. citizens or of specific immigration status. Benefits to those with green cards, allowing them to legally work here, were eliminated unless they had held the card for five years or more. Medicaid recipients now must show proof of citizenship.



Parishioners on their way to Mass at Cristo Rey Parish Church, 201 W. Miller Road, South Lansing. After services, some said they have been treated disrespectfully by authorities and coworkers. (Gretchen Cochran/City Pulse)

Since then, the Department of Homeland Security absorbed the Immigration and Naturalization Services. With the enactment of the REAL ID Act in 2005, the country's secretary of state offices, in effect, have been told to become the screeners for Homeland Security, but they received few dollars for training or implementation, according to Marta Gonzalez-Cortes, director of the Office of Migrant Affairs in the Michigan Department of Human Services. Sixteen states have decreed they will not comply with the REAL ID provision. While Michigan's legislature has discussed the issue, it has not taken action.

But Michigan's secretary of state is clamping down and word is out on which Lansing-area offices that Mexicans should go to for a worker ID.

"Jose" made 10 visits to various offices before he found one that would accept his birth certificate and his Social Security number as proof of identification.

Unless the state rejects it, by May 2008, the REAL ID will be required in Michigan for travel on an airplane, to open a bank account, collect Social Security payments or take advantage of nearly any government service, according to the American Civil Liberties Union's Web site. The ACLU opposes the concept.

So does Andrea Rodriguez, an administrator with the Lansing School District and a member of the Cristo Rey Church.

"I don't think, when we die, we'll be asked for a passport," she said.